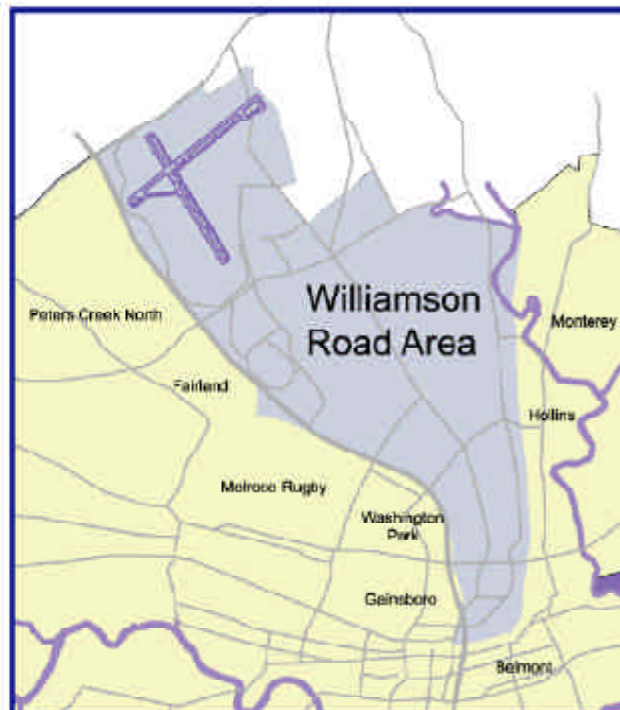


Introduction



The Williamson Road area is located in the northern part of Roanoke, stretching from downtown north to the city limits. It is made up of several neighborhoods, but is thought of by residents as a cohesive area because of its clear link to the recognizable corridor that runs its length.

I-581, the northern city limits, and the Norfolk Southern rail line define neighborhood edges. The area includes the airport, the Roanoke Civic Center, several commercial/industrial corridors, and diverse residential areas. Its 6.5 square miles constitute 15% of Roanoke's land area and nearly 14,000 persons live in the Williamson Road area, representing 15% of the city's population.

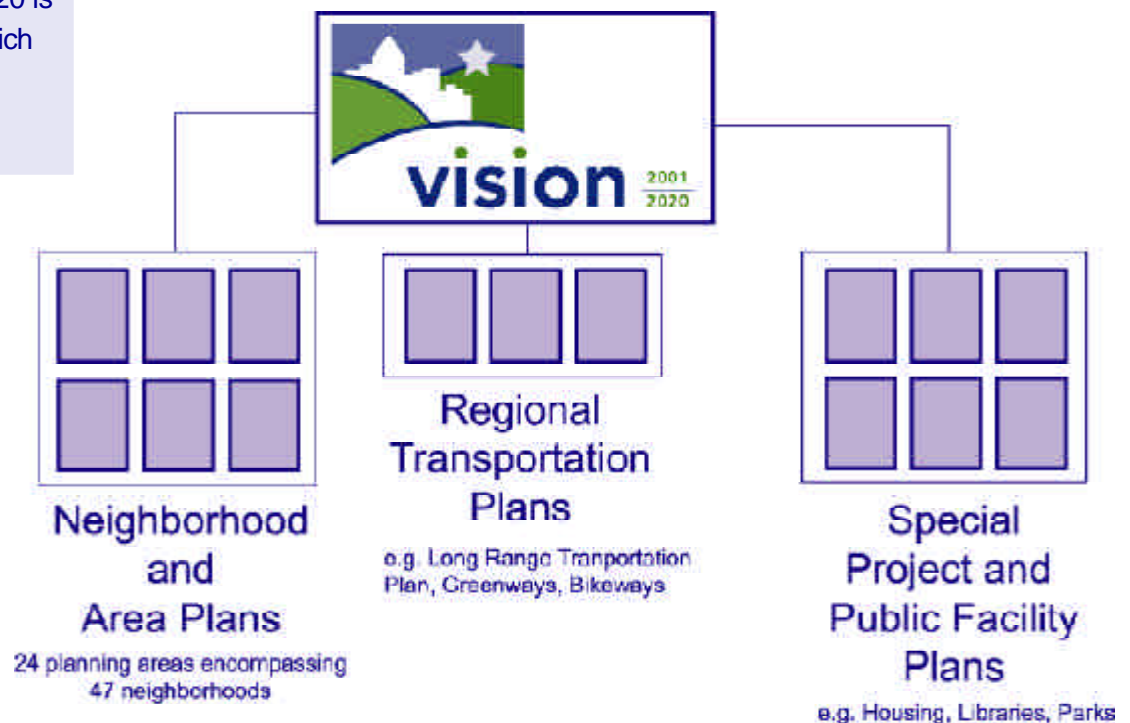


About Neighborhood Planning

In 1985, *Roanoke Vision*, the City's comprehensive plan called for the preservation and enhancement of existing neighborhoods and recommended that city policies and actions support neighborhood revitalization and preservation. A major recommendation toward that end was to develop a plan for each neighborhood. *Vision 2001-2020* continues support for neighborhood-based planning for a livable and sustainable city. This plan recommends actions that can be carried out by citizens, the city, neighborhood organizations, and other supporting interests, as well as policies that are used to guide future decisions. Neighborhood and area plans are official documents that are adopted by City Council and become part of the city's comprehensive plan.

Residents and businesses were involved in the planning process as community stakeholders. Planning staff sponsored three workshops in spring and summer 2003 to work with citizens to identify major neighborhood concerns. Once a draft of the plan was completed, staff sponsored two additional workshops in spring 2004 to review the draft version.

Roanoke's comprehensive plan is made up of many plans. *Vision 2001-2020* is the umbrella under which component plans are adopted.

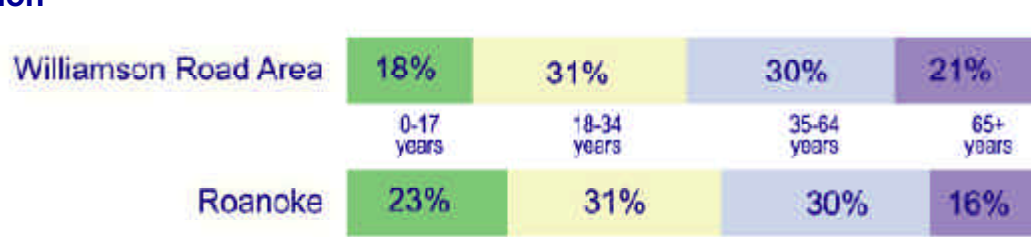


Population Characteristics

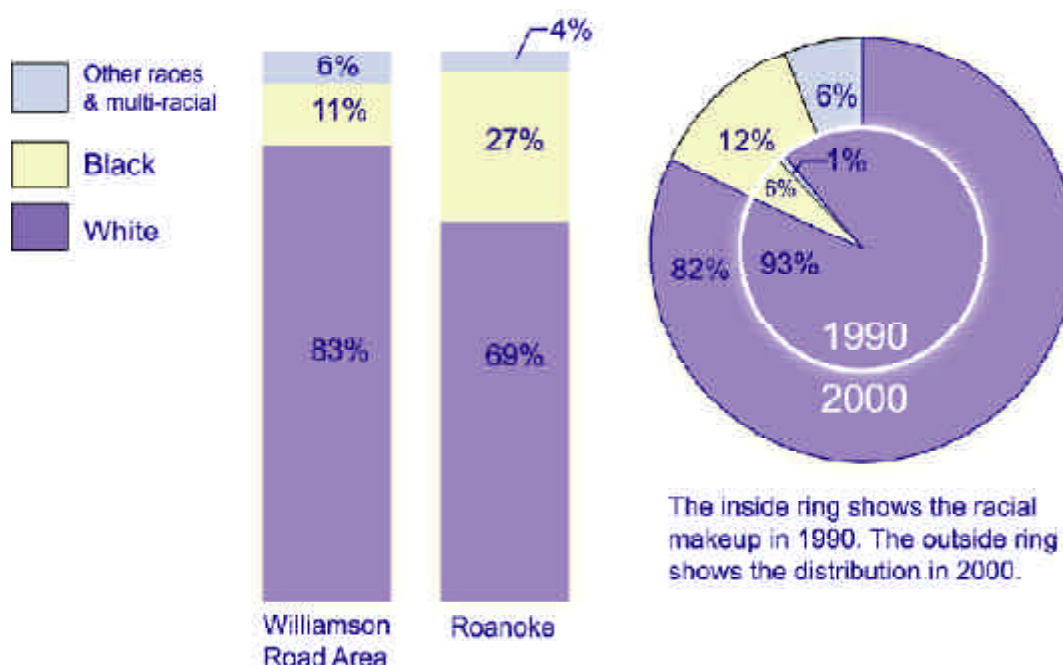
The population of the Williamson Road area is 13,957, and it decreased less than 1% between 1990 and 2000. Though the number of residents remained stable during the 1990s, the population diversified in terms of race. The African American population nearly doubled and people of multiple races or of other races more than tripled.

The area has a smaller percentage of young people and a higher percentage of seniors than the city as a whole.

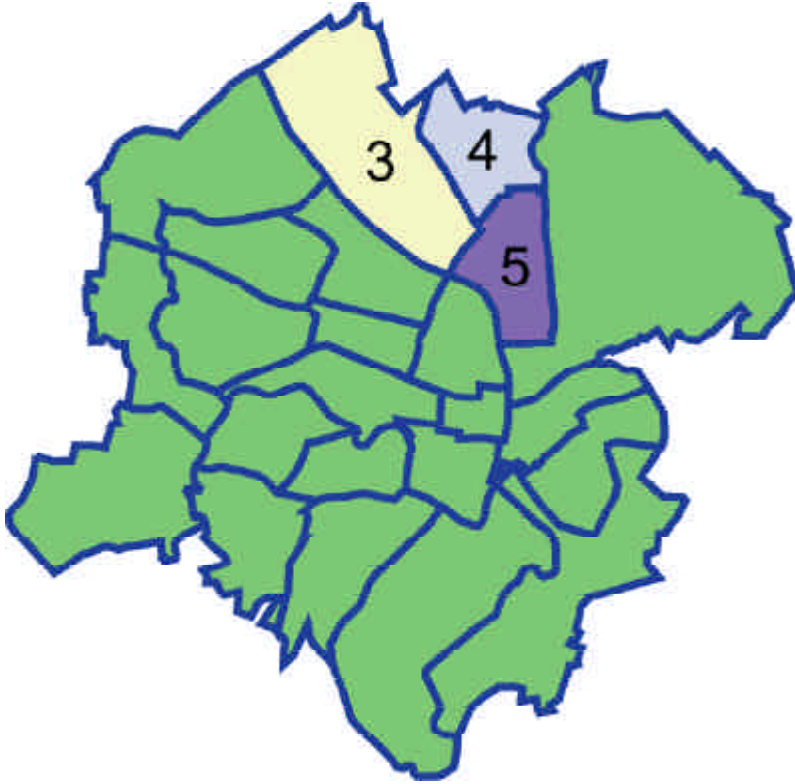
Age Distribution



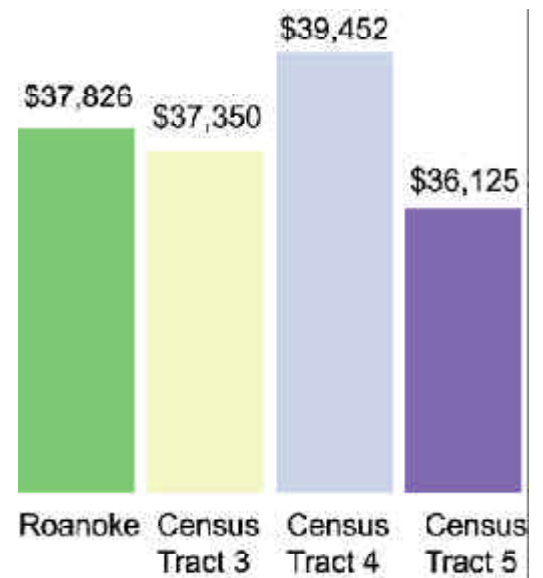
Racial Distribution



Census Tracts



Annual Family Income



Employment by Job Sector

<u>Employment Sector</u>	<u>Roanoke</u>	<u>Tract 3</u>	<u>Tract 4</u>	<u>Tract 5</u>
Management/Professional	27%	26%	20%	19%
Service	17%	19%	12%	15%
Sales/Office	30%	33%	37%	33%
Construction/extraction/maintenance	9%	7%	11%	11%
Production/transportation/material moving	17%	16%	21%	23%

Some figures may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Plan Elements

Discussion in this plan is organized into six major **Plan Elements**:

- ◇ Community Design
- ◇ Residential Development
- ◇ Economic Development
- ◇ Transportation
- ◇ Public Services & Facilities
- ◇ Quality of Life

The Community Design element looks at physical design features and land use patterns. Residential Development addresses existing and new housing opportunities. Economic Development deals with commercial and industrial development in the neighborhood. The Transportation element evaluates vehicular and pedestrian transportation systems. The Public Services & Facilities element assesses Fire/EMS, police, libraries, schools, and utility systems. Finally, the Quality of Life element addresses recreational opportunities, historic resources, environmental issues, and community involvement. Each plan element contains information about current conditions and issues.

High Priority Initiatives

This plan identifies the following **high priority themes**:

- ◇ Creating a network of unique and identifiable places
- ◇ Changing land use patterns to respond to emerging commercial development patterns
- ◇ Improving the appearance and function of streets
- ◇ Improving the design of new buildings and sites

In addition to these priority themes, the following important issues were identified by participants in the community workshops:

- ◇ Code enforcement
- ◇ Library improvements
- ◇ Widening of Plantation Road
- ◇ Stadium traffic
- ◇ Traffic calming
- ◇ Overhead utilities

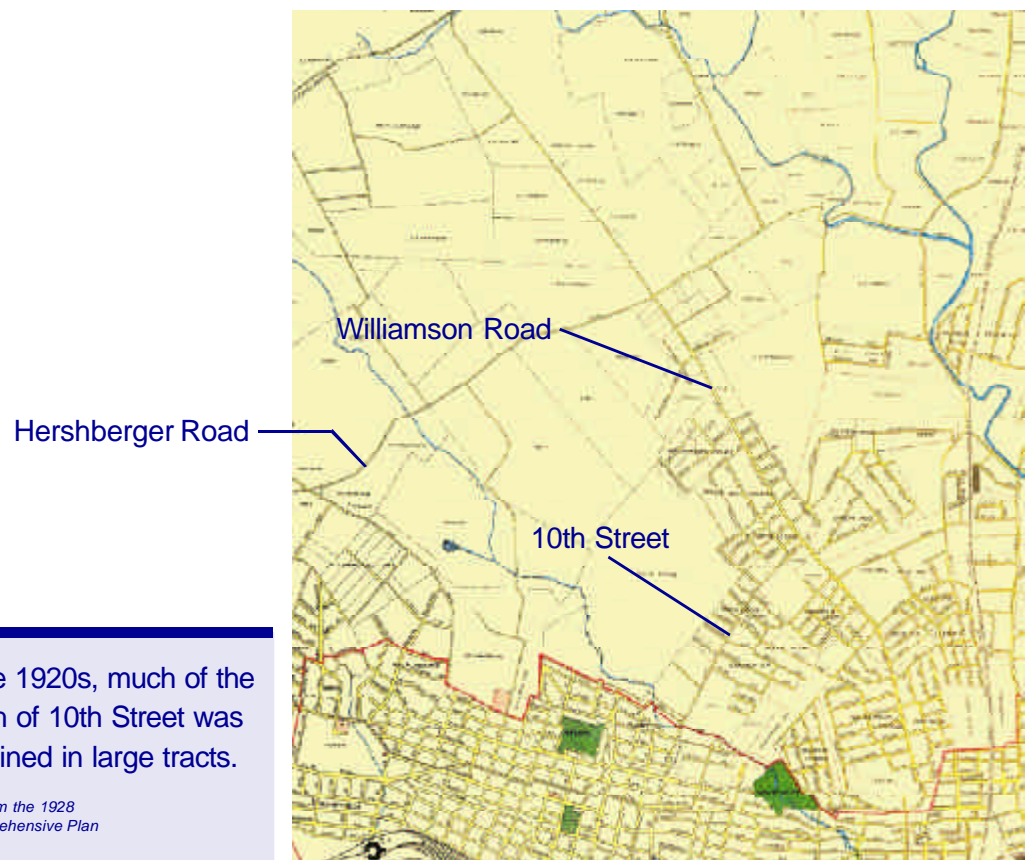
The plan establishes a framework for future land use decisions and also identifies areas where further detailed planning is necessary.

Development History

The Williamson Road area was settled at the same time as Roanoke, but it developed later in the city's history. Land in the Williamson Road area remained in the hands of just a few owners until the 1850s.

The first landowner in the area was Mark Evans, who acquired most of the area in the mid 1700s. The area was known as "The Barrens." His land was eventually sold by his heirs to several major property owners, including Robert Breckinridge. Tracts generally contained 300-400 acres. By the mid-1800s, tracts were in smaller increments from 150-250 acres. Major landowners were Edward Watts, Elisha Betts, Lucy Carvin, and Alexander Bruce. The Town of Gainsboro was established near the intersection of what is now I-581 and Orange Avenue. Gainsboro never achieved significant settlement as a town and was later absorbed into the City of Roanoke.

By the early 1900s, tracts were being sold in even smaller parcels of under 60 acres. Still, fewer than 100 families owned land in the Williamson Road area. By this time, major neighborhoods had been established around Roanoke's downtown and development began to extend into streetcar suburbs like Raleigh Court and Rugby.



In the late 1920s, much of the land north of 10th Street was still contained in large tracts.

*Map excerpt from the 1928
Roanoke Comprehensive Plan*

Until 1912, there was no Williamson Road. What is now Tenth Street was the only road of consequence in the area. Residents petitioned Roanoke County for a road that would lead to downtown. Several residents provided the funding, land, and machinery to build the road and the state provided labor. The state had to condemn the property of the Williamson family to acquire right-of-way. Immediately following the hard-surfacing of the road, businesses and residents began to develop along the length of Williamson Road.

Roanoke's real estate assessment records show that settlement was sparse until the 1900s, when widespread automobile ownership made the area more accessible and tracts began to be subdivided and sold as small individual lots. Between 1920 and 1940, about 1,000 lots were developed.

The era following WWII is when the real building boom came. Between 1940 and 1960, over 3,500 lots were developed. Postwar prosperity, housing shortages, new mortgage lending practices, and the automobile all combined to make the area both accessible and desirable to people seeking suburban home ownership. Development radiated out from the intersection of Liberty Road and Williamson Road. Most of the streets were laid out and most land was developed out by 1960, but significant residential development continued through the 1970s.

Commercial development has traditionally located along the Williamson Road corridor and was mixed with residential development. Indeed, many residential structures remain along the corridor.. Williamson Road steadily converted over to mostly commercial uses. The *1964 Development Plan for Roanoke* showed that Williamson Road was nearly all commercial. By 1970, the southern end of Williamson Road was anchored by the Civic Center and Sears Town. To the north, Crossroads Mall was built at the intersection of Hershberger Road in 1961.

Williamson Road became a vibrant, thriving commercial corridor lined with businesses, each competing for attention. In the 1960s and 70s, Williamson Road's straight lines and numerous traffic lights made it an ideal place for cruising and drag racing. The street actually became a social center of sorts as teens cruised up and down the road on weekends.

In the mid-1980s, Valley View Mall was built along the western side of the area, solidifying the Williamson Road area's identity as a major regional commercial center. Development in the Valley View Mall area continues and is nearing its full development capacity in terms of vacant land.